



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 167

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2021

No. 183

Senate

The Senate met at 10:02 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, touch the secret place inside each of us and know our hearts. In the stillness of this prayer moment, make us so transparent that we shall connect to Your power.

Lord, strengthen our lawmakers by the power of Your Holy Spirit, as the light of Your wisdom illuminates the recesses of their hearts. Lord, give our Senators the wisdom to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. When this day is done, may they look back with the realization that they have accomplished Your purposes.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, October 19, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WARNOCK thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Christine P. O'Hearn, of New Jersey, to be United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night, I began the process for the Senate to hold a vote on the Freedom to Vote Act, a commonsense proposal that would make it easier for every eligible American to participate in free and fair elections.

The bill, which my colleagues, including yourself, very diligently have worked on for months to put together will set basic standards to improve ballot access across the country, end partisan gerrymandering, and fight the influence of dark money and special in-

terests in our politics. It will go a long way toward restoring people's faith in our democracy while respecting the role of States in administering elections.

Every Senate Democrat has united around this legislation, and I thank all of my colleagues, including you, Mr. President, who worked so hard on this bill. I especially want to thank my friend Senator MANCHIN, who has spent weeks reaching out to our Republican colleagues in an effort to find common ground. I applaud him for his commitment to trying to get something done on this issue in a bipartisan way if we can.

The clock is ticking for this Chamber to take meaningful action to protect Americans' right to the franchise. So, tomorrow, the Senate will vote on cloture on the motion to proceed to the Freedom to Vote Act.

Every Senator will have to answer a straightforward question: Should the Senate be allowed to simply begin a debate on voting rights, as has been done many times throughout our history? That is what tomorrow's vote is about: Do the Members of this Chamber think protecting our democracy is worthy of even a debate in the Senate?

Senate Democrats think it absolutely is. If our Republican colleagues don't like our ideas for fighting voter suppression and guarding against election subversion, then they ought to tell us what they have in mind. If they are so confident of their position, then let's debate the issue on the Senate floor. What is there to be afraid of by allowing simply a debate?

Democrats are ready to work with Republicans in good faith if they vote to begin a debate on voting rights. We know disagreements run deep. We don't hide from that. But if our Republican colleagues have good ideas, we will work with them. We will listen to them, and if these ideas are truly aligned with the goals of this bill to protect our democracy, we will work to include them in the final text.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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What Republicans should not do—what they must not do—is squelch any chance for the Senate to debate something as critical and sacrosanct as the right to vote, nor should they pretend like the Federal Government has no role to play in protecting our democracy. On the contrary, throughout history, the Federal Government has sometimes been the only remedy when States try to suppress the vote. And no honest observer can look at the way the States have changed election laws this last year and pretend that there is nothing malicious afoot.

As Senator MANCHIN said earlier this year regarding congressional action on voting rights, inaction is not an option. Let me repeat that because this is one place where Senator MANCHIN and I agree. As Senator MANCHIN said earlier this year regarding congressional action on voting rights, “Inaction is not an option.” Inaction is not an option. I agree. All 49 other Democrats agree with Senator MANCHIN. Inaction is not an option.

The Senate can rise to the task if given the chance, but its Members must vote to begin debate first.

BUILD BACK BETTER AGENDA

Mr. President, now on Build Back Better, for decades now, millions of families in this country have found the basic American promise that if you work hard, then you can have a better life for yourselves and your loved ones, the proverbial American dream—Americans have found it is getting harder to reach. That is what creates a sourness in the land. That sunny optimism so crucial to our identity has receded away from view.

Democrats have promised to do something about it. When Senate Democrats secured our majority this year, we committed to delivering on the trust that the American people placed in us and to respond to the challenge of our times. That is why we immediately set to work and passed the American Rescue Plan to propel our economy out of the crisis of COVID. And that has been the driving force behind our efforts to make President Biden's Build Back Better agenda into law.

Last night, I continued my discussions with Speaker PELOSI and President Biden as we work to an agreement on legislation we can bring to the floor. I know that, throughout the day, the President will meet with a number of Members from both Chambers, and, as the week progresses, I will continue to hold talks with my colleagues as we move forward to the finish line.

Here is what matters: Build Back Better legislation is going to dramatically improve the lives of tens of millions of American families for years to come. Something that impactful is not an easy feat, but we are going to keep working. By passing this legislation, we can create good-paying jobs for this generation and the next; we can lower costs and cut taxes for American families while taking overdue steps to

meaningfully address the climate crisis.

We still have work to do, but we are going to continue at it until—until the job is done.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

THE ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, every day, American families are feeling real pain because of the reckless and inflationary policies that Democrats have already rammed through. The American people are facing the highest inflation in more than 10 years. They are paying an extra dollar a gallon at the pump and soaring prices at the grocery store. Real wages are down. Rising prices are wiping out raises and bonuses. Last month's jobs report was another huge disappointment, showing less than half the hiring that had been expected.

But, amazingly, the Biden administration and many of our colleagues seem to think the cure for this inflation hangover is the hair of the dog. They are trying to exploit the economic anxiety they have created by pitching yet another multitrillion-dollar socialist spending spree. They want to try to inflate their way out of inflation.

Oh, and get this: The Biden administration is simultaneously saying that their latest spending spree will cost zero dollars.

Let me say that again. The Biden administration is simultaneously saying their latest spending spree will cost zero dollars—it will be totally free—and it will come with massive, historic tax hikes in order to pay for it.

All this socialism is going to be totally free of charge—but it also needs the biggest IRS cash grab in decades in order to pay for it. Go figure. The Democrats' plan contains more than 40 separate tax hikes on the American people—40 separate tax hikes on the American people. These increases would impact taxpayers at every income level. Small business owners and family farmers would feel yet another pinch. Even the tax hikes that are ostensibly aimed at Washington Democrats' favorite punching bag, American industry, would find their way back down to working families.

Democrats' war on affordable American energy would hit pocketbooks just in time to spike winter heating bills and the prices of made-in-America goods. Their corporate tax hikes would leave American businesses paying a higher tax rate than businesses—listen to this—in communist China. As the Joint Committee on Taxation has shown, two-thirds of the burden of Democrats' proposed new taxes on businesses would fall on lower and middle-income Americans—two-thirds.

But Washington Democrats aren't just laying out massive new tax hikes in the light of day; they also want to

hand the IRS new snooping powers to start digging through individual Americans' bank accounts. They want to pay for their reckless taxing-and-spending spree by treating normal American households like everybody is under audit. They want to treat normal American households like everybody is under audit.

So, to review, this has been the story of Democrats' unified control of government in 2021. Here is what they have done: First, they knee-capped our economic recovery with stifling spending, including to pay Americans more to stay on the sidelines than to rejoin the workforce. Then, as working families feel the pinch of runaway prices, they are putting forward even more spending and also massive tax hikes. As icing on the cake, they have schemed for even greater access to Americans' personal finances so Washington bureaucrats can spy—can spy—on citizens' routine transactions.

This is not what American voters signed up for, and it won't earn a shred of support from this side of the aisle.

PROTESTS

Mr. President, now on another matter, last week, Washington, DC, was again the site of illegal political violence from the radical left. A mob of environmental extremists set upon the Department of the Interior. They shoved through blocked doors. They hurt the police and security personnel who tried to hold the line. These radicals put one law enforcement officer actually in the hospital.

Political violence and attacks on government buildings are flatout wrong no matter who is perpetrating them or what they claim to believe. That is why it is puzzling that last week's incidents attracted so little attention and condemnation. The White House was directly asked about the day's demonstrations just a few hours after the violence and the break-in occurred. Instead of condemning the radicals, the Biden administration actually praised them—praised them.

The White House Press Secretary was asked about the protests multiple hours after the violence and the break-in and said—this is a direct quote—“Of course we're listening to advocates and people who have been elevating the issue of climate for decades. They have important voices.”

So that is how the Biden administration officially described the demonstrators who put a cop in the hospital—“important voices.” This is just absurd. But those weren't just regrettable comments; they capture the politicized and selective approach to law enforcement that increasingly defines the Democratic Party.

Last year, our Nation saw a 30-percent jump in homicides—the biggest jump in the murder rate in modern history; the worst spike in the homicide rate in modern American history. The head of the National Center for Health Statistics says it was the worst increase in more than 100 years, since at